

*Continuity and Constraint: Reconstructing  
the Concept of Tradition from a Pacific  
Perspective*

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With the occurrence of an armed secessionist movement on Bougainville, military coups in Fiji, and the growing momentum of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, it is clear that issues of tradition and identity in the Pacific can no longer be treated as the stuff of abstract and disinterested anthropological scholarship. To be sure, each of these events or movements has been about political and economic power, but like conflicts elsewhere in the world (eg, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, and the Caucasus) they have also been rooted in contested views of the past and in claims to separate and distinctive identities understood to be derived from the past. In the postmodern world, tradition and identity are supplanting modernist political ideologies in the discourse of conflict (see Kuper 1994; Escobar 1992; Melucci 1980).

At roughly the same time as these political struggles have been taking place in the Pacific, anthropology has been going through some upheavals of its own. The very core of the modern discipline—fieldwork and ethnography—has come under a new critical scrutiny (see, eg, Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986).

These changes in the discipline of anthropology are related to changes that have been taking place among the societies that anthropologists have traditionally studied. Anthropology developed as an attempt to understand human diversity, the dimensions of which became known to the west through its own global expansion. Anthropology matured as a discipline in the context of colonialism, and sometimes its practitioners were more than mere beneficiaries of the colonial order (Asad 1973). In the

postcolonial world, villagers and urban elites alike have challenged the right of anthropologists to represent their cultures, and the postmodern critique within anthropology is a reaction to this restructuring in the power relations between anthropologists and others.

If ethnographic writing is a political act, what are the implications for anthropologists who wish to write about one of the most fundamental bases for a people's political action, their sense of themselves as a people? Tradition is central to that identity, for it includes a group's sense of their collective past, of who they are as a people, and how they came to be who they are.<sup>1</sup> The discourse of tradition is a political discourse, for the content of tradition is frequently contested. It represents a symbolic resource that can either support or undermine particular configurations of power. Anthropologists who write about tradition enter this political arena, for they cannot comment on the discourse of tradition without simultaneously adding their own voices to it.

#### THE "DISCOVERY" OF TRADITION

Tradition had been a fairly neglected topic in the social sciences for decades until the 1980s. In that decade it became the focus of a number of studies by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists. One contribution that attracted considerable attention to the topic among anthropologists working in the Pacific was a special issue of *Mankind* edited by Roger Keesing and Robert Tonkinson (1982). Contributors to the volume called attention to the malleability of tradition as a symbol. It was pointed out that *kastom* (Neo-Melanesian for "custom" or "tradition") can be evoked to defend old ways or to promote change and can be used to support national, even pan-Melanesian unity, or to promote separatist political movements (Keesing 1982, 297). The definition and evaluation of tradition were shown to be products of a discourse structured by political rivalry and competing ideologies (Lindstrom 1982, 317; Tonkinson 1982, 312).

Although the special issue of *Mankind* was a significant contribution to Pacific anthropology, it had little impact on other fields of study or even on anthropologists working in other areas of the world. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) had a much wider impact. This collection of papers by historians demonstrated that in modern nation states tradition is often a conscious invention of elites who fashion it in the service of maintaining domination. As in Keesing and

Tonkinson (1982), tradition was again shown to be political, but rather than focusing on discourse and contestation, Hobsbawm and Ranger's collection emphasized conscious invention, manipulation, and hegemony. The phrase they took as their title spread very rapidly, perhaps because it contains a "hook." It appears to be an oxymoron because *tradition* implies venerable age and continuity while *invention* implies novelty and deliberate fabrication (Lindstrom and White 1993).

For the rest of the decade, the most important anthropological studies of tradition focused on the issue of invention, and some of them dealt with contemporary Pacific Island societies (eg, Handler and Linnekin 1984; Hanson 1989; Keesing 1989; and Linnekin 1983, but also 1990, 1991, and 1992). This literature on the invention of tradition came at a historical moment when Pacific Islanders were determined to define their own identities, and they saw their traditions as playing an important part in this process. Anthropologists who celebrated the role of human creativity in the fashioning of the past in the present found their interpretations, even their right to speak on the issue, challenged by Pacific Islanders (see, eg, Trask 1993). From the perspectives of island activists, anthropological analyses seemed to imply, and in at least one case (Keesing 1989) directly stated, that the traditions that Māori, Hawaiians, and others were using as the ideological bases for political movements were inauthentic fabrications. Some Islanders felt they were being denied the right to define themselves.

I return to these political implications later, but for the moment wish to recognize that the invention-of-tradition literature made a useful contribution by focusing increased attention on a neglected topic, tradition, and linking it to issues that anthropologists have become increasingly interested in—the ways in which societies reproduce themselves, the ways in which culture and history interact to produce change, and the role of human agency in both processes. I contend that this literature was based on a distorted view of the nature of tradition. Analyses that place emphasis on processes of discourse and contestation do not escape the problem either. Ultimately, the emphasis on the malleability of tradition negates what is ostensibly affirmed in this literature—that a people's traditions are a product of their historically situated action. To support this claim, in the next section I examine a number of important contributions to the invention-of-tradition literature. This is not intended as a comprehensive survey, but rather it focuses on a few works that raise issues central to the construction of a more adequate understanding of tradition.

## THE INVENTION OF TRADITION

In ordinary discourse, the term *tradition* is understood to refer to a set of beliefs and practices that share (or are believed to share) some relationship to the past. The beliefs are either about the nature of life in the past or about the origins of current practices in the past (“since time immemorial”). Traditional practices are those that are believed to have originated in the past and are seen as a thread of continuity between past and present. They may include celebrations, rituals, folktales, costume, and other elements of expressive culture, as well as rules of conduct, items of material culture, and techniques.

In one way or another, each of the works I consider was an attempt to deconstruct this commonsense notion of tradition. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) left it pretty much intact, but the contributors to the volume challenged the authenticity of specific traditions, and the book as a whole sensitized other researchers to the role of invention in the production and reproduction of traditions.

From an anthropological perspective, all tradition—indeed culture itself—is invented, in the sense that it is a product of deliberate experimentation with, and recombination of, symbolic elements present in the repertoire of actors (Wagner 1981).<sup>2</sup> This is a reflective process that unfolds over time, but Hobsbawm’s distinction between authentic and invented traditions hinged on the length of time involved and whether or not the process is self-conscious (1983). That is, although invented traditions involve deliberate planning and manipulation to inculcate desired values, Hobsbawm’s “genuine” traditions evolve over a longer period of time *without* deliberate intent to indoctrinate.<sup>3</sup>

Hobsbawm hypothesized that while there are probably no times and places in which the invention of tradition does not occur, it will be most common in societies that are undergoing rapid transformations (1983). Invented traditions can be seen as attempts to reverse the breakdown of bonds of social solidarity or as attempts to produce a common identity where none previously existed. In Hobsbawm’s terms, then, one would expect an active process of invention in the newly independent countries of the Pacific, particularly in Melanesia where the cultural and linguistic diversity is extreme. The importance of the rhetoric of *kastom* in Melanesia can be viewed in this light (see, eg, Keesing 1982; Tonkinson 1982; Lindstrom and White 1993).

Roger Keesing saw the process of invention of tradition and identity as rampant, not only in Melanesia, but throughout the contemporary Pacific, including Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i (1989; see also Babadzan 1988). Keesing claimed that the pasts that Islanders are actively creating today often bear little resemblance to the lifeways of their ancestors as documented historically, ethnographically, and archaeologically. Invented traditions portray Pacific cultures, or selected elements of them, as opposite to negatively valued aspects of western culture, and according to Keesing the strength and appeal of those created pasts are related to this rejection of the devalued elements (cf, Thomas 1992a). This rejection of western culture is selective, and so, for example, the compatibility of custom and Christianity may be stressed in nationalistic rhetoric (see, eg, Tonkinson 1982).

The contrast that Keesing drew between authentic and inauthentic versions of the past, like Hobsbawm's (1983) distinction between genuine and invented traditions, assumed the existence of an objective and recoverable past. But lurking beneath the surface was another distinction—that between culture as a way of life and culture, *kastom*, or tradition as a substantivized representation of that way of life (see also Keesing 1982). Keesing objected to the disparity he saw between culture as it is (or was) lived and the way it was portrayed in concepts of *kastom* or tradition as symbols of identity. He saw anthropologists as (uniquely?) qualified to speak about the realities of cultures as lived and considered it their duty to spell out when past lifeways are portrayed inaccurately in nationalist rhetoric (1993, 587).

Though the terminology Allan Hanson employed was similar to that of Keesing, his article on the invention of Māori culture drew on a different scholarly tradition (1989). Whereas Keesing's piece was a Marxist critique of false consciousness (1989), Hanson eschewed the objectivist distinction between authentic and inauthentic traditions, maintaining that all traditions are inventions that draw on an interpreted past to meet the needs of the present. It is possible to distinguish, then, between a weaker approach to the deconstruction of tradition that differentiates between genuine and invented tradition, and a more radical approach that dissolves the distinction. (The latter more radical form of deconstruction has become dominant in the invention-of-tradition literature, at least in anthropology; my future references to that literature will be to the stronger form of critique.) Not surprisingly, peoples whose traditions have been

written about react similarly to both approaches, because both seem to call into question claims to the continuity of tradition.

In his article, Hanson traced the development of two elements of Māori tradition, the claim that New Zealand had been settled by the occupants of a Great Fleet, and the belief in the existence of a precontact cult of a supreme being named Io (1989). He claimed that anthropologists, working within the paradigm of diffusionist anthropology and motivated by the goal of merging European and Māori to form a single nation, laid down the foundations of both elements of tradition. Motivated by a different political agenda, Māori later drew on these constructed traditions to forge a common Māori identity and to differentiate themselves from European New Zealanders.

In discussing the Māori material, Hanson took as his starting point the observation that culture and tradition are not stable things handed down intact from one generation to the next, but are the products of an ongoing process of invention or fabrication. In discussing the fluidity of tradition Hanson invoked Jacques Derrida and claimed that to speak of a historically fixed tradition (the commonsense notion of tradition) is to engage in what Derrida called “the metaphysics of presence” and “logocentrism.” Rather than seeing the interpretations of nineteenth-century anthropologists and contemporary Māori as distortions of an essential core, Hanson suggested that Māori culture be viewed as having always been “a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play” (Derrida 1978, 280, quoted in Hanson 1989, 898).

Because traditions are always invented and fluid, according to Hanson, the anthropologist’s analytic task is not to strip away the inauthentic portions to expose an authentic core, but to understand the process by which invented traditions come to be accepted as authentic. Hanson saw this process of authentication as a simple matter of social reproduction. Just as any social behavior is reproduced in the context of everyday interaction, so are “invented traditions” reproduced and, in the process, authenticated.

Hanson pointed out that while this encompassment of invention in ordinary social reproduction demystifies the process, it fails to distinguish it, and, after all, he claimed, there is a need to recognize that something is distinctive about the process of invention. He proposed that the term *invention* be limited to sign substitutions that are considerably different from those on which they are modeled, that are selective, and that sys-

tematically reflect a particular political agenda (1989, 899). Focusing on the last of these three characteristics, who determines that a particular instance of social reproduction is not only innovative but also systematically political in intent?

Very often . . . the inventive quality of sign-substitutions is only recognizable from the outside and when they form clusters. Percy Smith, Edward Tregear and Elsdon Best [New Zealand anthropologists who played a role in crystalizing Māori tradition] worked ingenuously within the tradition of diffusionist anthropology. . . . Certainly they did not consider these theories to be inventions. The same may be said of contemporary advocates of Maoritanga. But when detached observers consider these two movements as wholes, and compare the images of Maori culture they advocate and the political agendas they espouse, their status as inventions becomes obvious. (Hanson 1989, 899)

The question is, who are these detached observers, and is such detachment possible? It would appear, after all, that Hanson's position is not so very different from Keesing's in at least one respect: disinterested anthropologists can spot invention while cultural insiders might not. But just when it seemed that Hanson had retreated to an objectivist position, he pointed out that his own essay was itself simply an exercise in sign substitution, no more privileged in its truth claims than any other. (Barber has argued that this postmodernist denial of truth claims can also be seen as a denial of responsibility for what is written [1990].)

Hanson finished off his essay by raising the question of whether the essay itself could be seen as an invention. He concluded that it could not but that the invention-of-tradition literature, taken as a whole, is an invention insofar as it does depart significantly from previous anthropological thinking on the nature of tradition. There is an issue here that Hanson did not consider. As a cultural invention, the invention-of-tradition literature must "systematically manifest the intention to further some political or other agenda" (Hanson 1989, 899). What political agenda motivates the invention-of-tradition literature? None is acknowledged, with the effect that its writers appear to be debunking the political ideology of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement (Linnekin 1983; Handler and Linnekin 1984), Quebec nationalism (Handler 1983, 1984, 1985), or efforts toward Māori self-determination (Hanson 1989) from some privileged and dispassionate vantage point, even though individual authors might stress that this is not what they intend. However, cultural

insiders do see a political agenda in this literature (see, eg, Trask 1991, 1993).

Hanson's depiction of Māori culture as a "non-locus" and a process of "sign substitutions" provoked a great deal of controversy in New Zealand, not only among Māori activists but also among academics, both European and Māori. (See Webster 1993 for a good discussion of the reaction of New Zealand academics.) It is not difficult to see why the article would have provoked such a strong reaction. First, it gives insufficient attention to precontact elements in the two themes of Māori tradition that Hanson discussed. Thus, although he argued that the Great Fleet tradition is the product of European efforts to systemize, compile, and interpret diverse Māori sources, he paid little attention to the fact that the sources being interpreted were Māori.

Second, when viewed from the perspective of many New Zealanders, Hanson's scholarly attempt to deconstruct the notion of an essential Māori tradition was politically insensitive. He argued that the semiotic process of sign substitution was not random. Those anthropologists whose work crystallized the traditions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had particular motives, as do modern proponents of Māoritanga (Māoriness). Recognizing that the construction of tradition occurs within a political force field, Hanson was also aware that Māori have not exerted equal power in New Zealand political life for a long time. To say that Māori tradition as defined by Māori themselves is simply an exercise in sign substitution, an arbitrary assigning of meaning no more nor less authentic than any other, was predictably seen as denying them the power to define who and what they are or were. Third, in an article about the invention of Māori culture, one might expect some discussion about the culturally specific *geist* that governs its invention or construction. When a people interpret their past, their interpretations do not simply reflect the political expediency of the moment; they also reflect cultural structures of long duration. There is no discussion in the Hanson article of this kind of continuity through time; theoretically speaking, this is the article's greatest deficiency. I argue later that this lacuna is common in the invention-of-tradition literature. In Hanson's case this is especially problematic because elsewhere he has provided a good discussion of the kinds of structures I mean (see Hanson and Hanson 1983, especially pages 190–194). He did not integrate those insights into the essay being discussed here, however.

One last point arises from the Hanson article. Levine pointed out



that what Hanson discussed as the invention of Māori *culture* would more properly be termed the construction of *political ideology* (1991). More precisely, Hanson elided the distinction between “culture as lived” and tradition. Tradition includes the aspect of political ideology that draws on an interpreted past as a symbolic resource. This confusion of culture as a system of symbols with culture as symbol (of identity) enabled Hanson to extend the role of anthropologists from that of interpreters of Māori culture to creators of it. But as Webster pointed out, it is only the representations of a culture that can be created, appropriated, or exploited by outsiders (1993, 238). “Culture as lived” necessarily remains in the hands of those whose culture it is.

Jolly has rejected this distinction between culture as lived and tradition, on the grounds that the presumed unself-consciousness of culture as lived is too easily equated with authenticity, and the self-conscious construction of tradition with inauthenticity (1992a; see also Lindstrom and White 1993). These equations clearly lie behind Hobsbawm’s distinction between genuine and invented traditions, for example (1983; see also Handler and Linnekin 1984, 280). But the notion that culture as lived is unself-conscious and unreflective is untenable. After all, the phrase implies a set of concepts, strategies, skills, and so on that one needs in order to get on in a socially constructed world, and this process of “getting on” always requires some reflection. But tradition involves the substantivization of certain aspects of a way of life that then become symbols of group identity (see Thomas 1992a; 1992b). Since the forging of tradition is a process of self-identity, what matters most in social analysis is not whether the past was *really* the way a people claim it was, so much as those aspects of their past and present that limit, structure, and explain their portrayal of the past. Lindstrom referred to tradition as an attempt “to read the present in terms of the past by writing the past in terms of the present” (1982, 317). The context in which that reading and writing take place deserves attention.

Jocelyn Linnekin has perhaps written more extensively on these processes of identity construction and invention of tradition than any other anthropologist working in the Pacific. Her work furthers the understanding of tradition in important ways, but, like Hanson (1989), in her theoretical discussions of the invention of tradition she failed to pay sufficient attention to cultural structures of long duration that inform tradition and make it intelligible.

Linnekin’s writings on the topic of tradition span almost a decade, long

enough for her views to have undergone a kind of evolution. In her earliest paper on the topic (1983), her position was arguably closer to that of Hobsbawm (1983) than to that of Hanson (1989). In it she stated that "For Hawaii 'traditional' properly refers to the precontact era, before Cook's arrival in 1778" (1983, 242). This implies that any values, beliefs, or practices that have become part of Hawaiian culture since that time are not genuinely traditional. In her most recent article on the subject, however, she positioned the invention-of-tradition literature within the postmodern project of decentering anthropological discourse. Questions of authenticity are ultimately unanswerable because "all cultural representations—even scholarly ones—are contingent and embedded in a particular social and political context" (Linnekin 1992, 250).

Despite the differing perspectives that isolated snippets of text seem to imply, however, Linnekin's views on the nature of tradition have been fairly consistent on some key points:

- 1 Tradition is fluid because it always reflects the needs of an ever-changing present.

- 2 Tradition is not a "thing" or set of "things." To treat it as if it were implies that there is some essential, definable core when, in fact, tradition is always shifting. Further, to treat tradition as if it were a thing is to naturalize and objectify a concept.

- 3 Rather than being a definable collection of things, tradition is a process through which the past and aspects of social life said to be derived from the past are valorized in the present.

- 4 Tradition, as a process of interpretation that draws on the past to define an identity in the present, is distinct from culture, though the process of invention is central to both.

- 5 Insofar as tradition is always changing, the distinction between genuine and inauthentic traditions is spurious.

I agree with each of these points, and Linnekin and others who have developed these issues have furthered our understanding of the nature of tradition. The problem with Linnekin's work lies not in the various theoretical points she has made, but in the way she has applied this theoretical framework in analyzing Hawaiian tradition. There is a certain dissonance between her articles on the invention of tradition and her ethnographic writing. First, the theoretical insights that she developed elsewhere (Handler and Linnekin 1984) were not fully integrated into her ethnography, *Children of the Land* (1985). There she wrote of Ke'anae, a Hawaiian

community on Maui's windward coast, as representing "as traditional a lifestyle as can be found in the islands" (1985, 22). She noted that it represents "a more authentic tradition than the somewhat eclectic version promoted by Hawaiian nationalism" (1985, 2), although "the pursuit of a real Hawaiian tradition is difficult in this context, where authenticity seems so easily invented" (1985, 239). In these and other passages Linnekin's usage implies that tradition entails an essential, enduring core of culture traits, quite different from that summarized here. Second, the important continuities that she did demonstrate in *Children of the Land* are not emphasized in her more theoretical discussions of Hawaiian tradition. The consequence of this disjunction between her theoretical and ethnographic writing is that an important characteristic of tradition is inadequately explored.

That important characteristic is continuity in the interpretive framework through which a people understand and evaluate human action. For example, the residents of Ke'anae make a spatial distinction between "inside" and "outside." This distinction draws on a number of different contrasts: rural versus city life, Hawaiian versus "foreign" spheres of interaction, east (the direction of the Hawaiian community of Hāna further "inside") versus west (the direction of the town of Kahului "outside"), and wet versus dry. But the distinction also connotes contrasting systems of social relations—the hierarchic, market-oriented relations of the "outside" world and the egalitarian, generalized exchange that ought to obtain "inside." Surely there are continuities here with contrasting spheres of exchange in precontact society—hierarchy confirming flows of tribute, on the one hand, and solidarity enhancing reciprocity on the other.

This emphasis on intracommunal generalized reciprocity is associated with a ranking of the items that get exchanged, and Linnekin noted that here, too, there has been continuity. For example, the most highly valued foods exchanged at modern luau are the same foods that were formerly presented to the gods (Linnekin 1985, 115). Linnekin also pointed out that the structural emphasis on ties traced through women, a characteristic of contemporary Hawaiian kinship, may also have a basis in precontact society (1985, 104–105). Thus, the ways in which social relationships are both traced and expressed exhibit continuities. Moreover, these ways of expressing relatedness through exchange are not only understood to be rooted in the past, but also defined as *characteristically Hawaiian*. In a word, they are traditional.

One might expect that these threads of continuity that Linnekin explored in *Children of the Land* would have been central to her more theoretical discussions of Hawaiian tradition. Certainly one can find in these articles statements acknowledging that the process of interpreting the past reflects continuity. She noted, for example, that by emphasizing that tradition is symbolically constructed in the present, she did “not mean to suggest a cultural tabula rasa for every generation” (1990, 161). She acknowledged that to many non-anthropologists the word “‘invention’ suggests *de novo* creation and hence inauthenticity” (1992, 252), though this is not what either she or Hanson (1989) meant by the term. One looks in vain for a sustained development of these statements in her more theoretical discussions of Hawaiian tradition and identity. There, the emphasis is on invention as a process of discontinuity; that is, the aspect of invented traditions that is stressed is the way in which they represent departures from what came before.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis is general throughout the literature on the invention of tradition. Indeed, as Hanson pointed out, the use of the term *invention* is a deliberately provocative rhetorical move meant to imply novelty and deliberate fabrication (1989, 450). Having invested in that rhetorical move, Hanson and Linnekin paid insufficient attention to the continuities of interpretive structure that they themselves explored in other publications (Hanson and Hanson 1983; Linnekin 1985). The result is a distorted and inadequate view of the nature of tradition. The most serious problem here is not lack of sensitivity to efforts of national or ethnic self-definition, but that through inadequate attention to the continuities that guide these processes they will be misunderstood.

#### CONTINUITY AND CONSTRAINT

The invention-of-tradition literature has produced some valuable insights, but I would argue that in order to correctly portray the process of invention (I would prefer the word *interpretation*), one must acknowledge continuity and constraint as aspects of tradition. These ideas are not totally absent from the invention-of-tradition literature (see, eg, Linnekin 1990, 1992), but they have definitely been suppressed in favor of an emphasis on the “free play of sign substitution,” novelty, and discontinuity.

In this respect the invention-of-tradition literature could be seen, I suppose, as presenting a liberating view of the human condition. In a sense it

is the counterpart, on the collective level, of contemporary western ideas of individualism, in which individuals, as something isolable from the social whole and from any particular roles or relationships, are seen as free to recreate and redefine themselves. What contributors to the invention-of-tradition literature have chosen not to emphasize is that societies, like persons, are embedded in determinate pasts that limit and explain the process of self-identity.

The process by which a people interpret their collective past (ie, the formulation of tradition) is constrained by the past in two senses. First, a people live in a historically constructed world that exists independently of them and their interpretations. The physical aspects of that world, the various societies that coexist in it, and the positioning of those societies relative to one another are all historical products. No society freely chooses its own history, nor is it free to choose its own position in the world (central or peripheral, powerful or relatively powerless) (Webster 1993; Friedman 1992b). But these facts about a society's position in the world can determine whether or not its members are free to define themselves for others, project their own interpretations of their history, and maintain their own traditions. Cultural or political movements such as the Hawaiian renaissance and Māori self-determination are attempts to reclaim the power of self-definition. The specific content of the traditions asserted by such movements can only be understood in the context of particular histories. One of most frequent criticisms of the invention-of-tradition literature is that it has not paid sufficient attention to this fact. The traditions projected by nationalistic movements are often portrayed as strategic maneuvering on the part of political elites motivated by considerations of the present. Inadequate attention is paid to the historical processes that produced the particular political fields within which elites must operate (compare, eg, Handler 1984 and Arcand 1984 on Quebec nationalism).

Whether the emphasis is on the self-interested positioning of political elites (Keesing 1989) or "the decentered play of sign substitutions" (Hanson 1989), the literature on the invention of tradition has not only underplayed the constraining force of history, but it often glosses over the network of social relations and institutions within which tradition and identity are constructed and asserted. As Norton has recently argued, many of the recent discussions of tradition in the Pacific (including some that do not focus on the process of invention) "privilege the logics of discourse in ways that tend to obscure the manner in which discourse oper-

ates in a field of concrete social relations and cultural practices" (1993, 742). To a great extent this literature reflects the project of an American-style cultural anthropology (cf, Kuper 1994). The goal is to explicate the culturally specific systems of symbols used in the discourse on tradition. Although there may also be an attempt to understand the strategic deployment of symbols, the field of social relations within which this discourse takes place often remains a shadowy stage.

Norton pointed out that the effect of this situation is to blur important differences that exist among Pacific Island societies. The social fields within which the discourse on tradition is transacted are very different in Hawai'i and Fiji, for example. In Fiji there is a congruence between the discourse on tradition and "routine social experience" (Norton 1993, 745). In contrast, in Hawai'i and New Zealand cultural identity has to be constructed and asserted in *opposition* to the routine social experience of life in societies dominated by other ethnic groups.

To be sure opposition also plays a role in the politics of tradition in Fiji. It can be argued, as Thomas (1992a) has, for example, that contemporary Fijian culture differs (necessarily?) from its precontact antecedents in the degree to which it is defined in opposition to the values, customs, and patterned behavior of other ethnic groups. To this Norton might respond that while opposition is important in the *discourse* on culture and tradition in Fiji, Fijian identities are nonetheless constructed in the context of social action in a field of structured social relations. The routines of everyday life continually assert and reproduce a distinct Fijian identity and, consequently, oppositional discourse does not have the same significance as it does in Hawai'i or New Zealand.

Norton has rendered a service with the reminder that tradition and identity are constructed, asserted, and discussed in the context of ongoing social relations; that these systems of social relations vary significantly throughout the Pacific; and that local discourses on identity and tradition can only be understood in terms of these differences (1993). But although his call to refocus attention on social relations and the routines of everyday life is salutary, in my opinion he placed too great a stress on social *structure* as the field in which those routines are lived. This led him to overemphasize the differences in the ways Māori and Fijian identities are constructed, but to make that point, I must return to a claim I made earlier.

I stated that a people's interpretation of their past in the present (a process that generates tradition) is constrained by the past in two senses. The

first is through the nature of the physical and social world in which they find themselves. That world is a product of historical processes that unfolded independently of a people's present-day interpretations of them, and the configuration of that world either limits or empowers their efforts to define themselves and their past for others.

The second constraint derives not from the determinate nature of a people's past, but from their own prior interpretations. What is at issue here is not the specific content of those interpretations, but the cultural logic that informs them. Much of the recent literature on tradition ignores how the inventive or discursive process is guided by deep and relatively enduring structures of thought, feeling, and action. When a people selectively fashion their vision of the past, they do so in terms of cultural categories (Sahlins 1985), culturally specific logics (eg, the recursive dualism characteristic of the cultures of some Austronesian-speaking peoples; Mosko 1985), culturally specific models of personhood that inform understanding of motivation and agency (see, eg, Levy 1973; White and Kirkpatrick 1985), and culturally standardized scenarios (ie, models of and for social action or process; see, eg, Schieffelin 1976; Turner 1986). They cannot do otherwise and still construct (for themselves) meaningful interpretations of human action in the past or the present, any more than they can form meaningful utterances without instantiating the grammatical categories of their language.

To say that these underlying structures of thought, feeling, and action are *relatively* enduring is to imply that they do change, just as the grammar of a language changes. They can change as a consequence of their own internal logics or in response to catastrophic events and culture contact. Individuals, whose cognitions and actions instantiate these structures, are agents of both continuity and change. Each person both "maintains the continuity of meanings and transforms them by virtue of actively constituting an understanding of the world in and through relations with others" (Toren 1994, 979).

To say that this process of interpreting the past is *structured* is to recognize that a person's actions in the present (including the act of interpretation) are dependent on a determinate past. That past, independently of current interpretations of it, produced the cognitive, emotive, and habitual structures that make each person what they are. Thus, each person is a product as well as an agent of history; indeed, their agency is a historical product.

These structuring structures of thought, feeling, and action produce the continuities of the long term. (On the concept of “structuring structures” or “structuration” see Giddens 1979, 1984; Bourdieu 1977.) The structures that guide the interpretation of the past or “invention of tradition” are laid down through the routines of everyday life. The issue I take with Norton (1993) is that those routines are linked to, but not fully contained by, social structure. A society may undergo massive structural transformations, yet some areas of daily routine and some collective habits of thought, feeling, and action may be left intact. A people’s ongoing interpretations of their past and definition of their collective identity reflect or resonate with these continuities, as much for Māori and Hawaiians as for Fijians. While the identities of submerged peoples may be forged and projected through oppositional discourse, that oppositional discourse can also be a product of a historically rooted and distinctive identity experienced in a political field dominated or contested by others.

The continuity and constraint that I see as important characteristics of tradition are, in part, consequences of the fact that tradition is *enacted* or *embodied*. Through their bodies human beings experience and act on the world (Farnell 1994). Those experiences and actions of their personal and collective pasts leave their marks on their bodies in the form of characteristic motor patterns and postures—what Connerton (1989) called habit memory—as well as characteristic modulations of the senses. But the centrality of the body goes deeper. As noted earlier, a people’s interpretation of their past and their claims to identity in the present necessarily reflect structuring structures of thought, feeling, and behavior, and those patterns of cognition and emotion as well as of action are all centered in the human body. If the study of tradition is narrowed to a consideration of the discourse on tradition, there is a risk of misunderstanding it in a fundamental way.

Invention has been supplanted by an emphasis on discourse in much of the recent literature on tradition and identity in the Pacific. This literature focuses on an important aspect of the processes through which particular traditions are constructed, projected, and contested in localized contexts. Often it is not the *act* of speaking that is the principal object of analysis, however, but the product of the act (and interaction), the text. But tradition itself (as opposed to what anthropologists write about what other people write or say about their traditions) is not a disembodied text; it is embodied action. In the next section, I examine the issue of continuity in the context of embodied tradition in contemporary Fiji.



## EMBODIED TRADITION IN FIJI

The invention-of-tradition literature is an attempt to reinterpret the link between social formations understood to be derived from the past and social action in the present. Rather than viewing tradition as a passively accepted legacy, the literature sees it as an active interpretive process in which representations of the past are forged through conflict and discourse in the present. I have argued that contributors to this rethinking of tradition have paid too little attention to issues of continuity and constraint.

Contemporary Fiji is an especially appropriate case for examining these questions, in part because the issue of invented traditions has been raised in the aftermath of the military coups of 1987 and the subsequent constitutional changes in Fiji. The coups themselves were part of a more general process of ferment centered on issues of ethnicity and tradition that had been simmering since the colonial era.

British colonial policy emphasized ethnic distinctions in such areas of public life as administration, education, and political representation. Structural conflicts developed between the interests of Indo-Fijians and Fijians, a process abetted by European business interests and the colonial administration. The resultant Fijian and Indo-Fijian ethnic blocs are internally diverse, however, and historically their unity has largely been a product of their mutual confrontation. There has always been the potential for building alliances across the ethnic divide on the basis of shared regional and class interests. The Coalition Party that successfully contested the 1987 national election had forged such an alliance.

The Coalition offered a new formulation of the roles of ethnicity and Fijian tradition in national political life. Under Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's leadership, the Alliance Party that governed Fiji throughout its first seventeen years of independence projected a consociational model of nationhood. (On the concept of consociational nationhood see, eg, Lijphart 1977.) The rights and interests of all ethnic groups would be respected as the country as a whole progressed along a path of controlled development. Fiji was promoted as "the way the world ought to be," a model of interethnic cooperation and tolerance. This vision assumed, however, that national development would proceed under an ethnic Fijian leadership in which chiefly hierarchy and tradition played important roles.

During the campaign leading up to the 1987 election, Dr Timoci Bavadra, the leader of the Coalition, argued for the separation of Fijian chiefly

tradition and modern electoral politics and called for the abandonment of the politics of ethnicity in favor of a recognition of the common interests of all Fiji's citizens. Pursuant to the latter his party also proposed a reorganization of the Native Lands Trust Board, the agency that administers the leasing of Fijian-owned land and whose policies are of vital concern to both Indo-Fijian tenants and Fijian owners. The leader of the coups, then-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, attempted to justify his action, in part, in terms of the supposed threat to Fijian land rights that this reorganization would pose (Dean and Ritova 1988).

To be sure, concrete issues of political and economic power lay behind the coups, but these events must also be seen as the outcome of a highly charged confrontation between alternative visions of nationhood, ethnicity, and tradition. In this context the deconstruction of tradition has inescapable political significance. Raising what Margaret Jolly called the specter of inauthenticity (1992a), Fijian, Indo-Fijian, and foreign critics of the coups have pointed out that such central features of contemporary Fijian traditionalism as the system of land tenure and the Great Council of Chiefs are really constructions of British colonialism.

This charge, that institutions that many Fijians consider central to a distinctly Fijian way of life are really colonial legacies, is not new. In a carefully researched book, Peter France showed how the British, under the initial leadership of Sir Arthur Gordon, constructed the legal system of Fijian land tenure (1969). Rather than attempting to devise a new tenurial system designed to meet Fijians' contemporary needs, Gordon sought to base the system on what he thought were ancient principles of communal ownership. A series of Native Lands Commissions were charged with the task of investigating these "ancient principles" and codifying them into law. France showed how the commission's model of customary Fijian tenure reflected the assumptions of the social evolutionary theory current in nineteenth-century anthropology. His deconstruction of this colonial invention anticipated Hobsbawm and Ranger's book (1983) by more than a decade.

Given France's pioneering work and the subsequent impact of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), it is not surprising that the concept of invented tradition has been used in recent anthropological writing on Fiji (see, eg, Rutz 1987; Kaplan 1989, 1990). The problem with the term *invented tradition*, however, is that the implication of inauthenticity seems unavoidable, whether intended by the author or not, and in the context of con-

tested views of the past the label of “inauthenticity” has political implications that must be acknowledged. Moreover Hobsbawm’s distinction between genuine and invented traditions (1983) ignored the fact that beliefs and practices are “traditional” when they inform the consciousness and behavior of actors. At that point the distinction between “genuine” and “invented” traditions may not be relevant to the actors themselves. Whatever the origins of the belief, practice, or institution, it has become their tradition (cf, Thomas 1992a, 71). Because it is theirs, they will continue to contemplate, evaluate, and reinterpret it as long as it remains relevant to their lives in the present and to their vision of the future. Fijians today are intensely involved in these processes, and they do not all agree. Studying this social ferment demands clarity about what is involved in reproducing or rejecting tradition.

Fijians themselves have some important insights into these processes. They acknowledge that custom and tradition have altered over time as certain values, practices, and beliefs have been deleted and others added. Tradition is defined as appropriate action rather than being viewed as a set of static prototypes derived from the past. That is, whether understood to be endogenous or exogenous in origin, and whether the product of an unself-conscious evolution or a deliberate fabrication, beliefs and practices come to be accepted as traditional if they conform to certain very general cultural principles that are assumed to have obtained in the past as they do in the present. Given this understanding of tradition, Fijians are able to conceptually bridge the disjunction between the pre-Christian past of their ancestors and the postcolonial present.

Jolly has contrasted this Fijian perception of continuity with the ni-Vanuatu sense that colonialism represents a rupture in their history (1992b). The ni-Vanuatu have attempted to reassert control over their own history and identity through a self-conscious revival of *kastom* on both the national and local levels. Other Melanesian examples could be adduced for both the Fijian and ni-Vanuatu reactions. Jolly saw the explanation for these differing perceptions of history in differences of colonial policy in the two island groups. In Fiji, she noted, the colonial administration valorized custom, at least those aspects of it that did not promote “disorder” and hence threaten British control (Kaplan 1989). According to Jolly, of equal, if not greater importance, is that the preservation of Fijian land rights was made the cornerstone of colonial policy in the early period, and later attempts to make the sale of native lands easier were

unsuccessful. In contrast, instead of a unified colonial policy in Vanuatu there was an uneasy balance between French and British interests. The alienation of native lands was much more extensive than in Fiji, and in that, Jolly suggested, lay the root cause of the ni-Vanuatu sense of loss and rupture in their history. Moreover, in Vanuatu there was no positive valuation of native custom on the part of colonial administrators; at best there was tolerance.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of the preservation of Fijian control of land as a factor in the colonial and postcolonial history of Fiji. But though British colonial policy toward Fijians had a benign aspect, government control was extended by force in some areas, and the colonial administration could be meddlesome, arrogant, and repressive when its control appeared to be threatened. It leveled taxes and made demands on Fijians' time and labor, and (something remembered by older Fijians) colonial society operated with a color bar. There would be ample justification for Fijians to view it as a disruptive intrusion that denied them control over their own history.

I noted earlier that daily routine plays an important role in the sedimentation of the structuring structures of thought, feeling, and action that generate the reproduction of culture. These "structuring structures" play a central role in the interpretation of human motivation and action and are the basis of an understanding of the past as well as the present. It is highly significant, then, that in Fiji and elsewhere much of the representativeness of colonial regimes focused on daily routines and the body.

In Fiji the imposition of new forms of bodily control and "shaping" predated colonialism. At the time of contact, Fijian men wore their hair long and invested considerable time, care, and ingenuity in dressing it (Williams 1982). This can be seen as a local expression of a common Oceanic view of the head as the center of mana. Male dress consisted of a barkcloth loincloth (*malo*). Women wore short, fringed skirts (*liku*), and both tattooing and scarification were used to beautify women's bodies (Williams 1982).

Christian missionaries insisted that their converts cut their long hair and that men and women alike replace traditional garments with cotton waist-cloths (*sulu*). Fijian bodies thus transformed not only bore the marks of religious conversion, but also expressed political alignment. Through his own conversion, Cakobau, the head of the Bauan confederacy and self-styled King of Viti, had made Christianity the official religion of the

territories he controlled. The peoples of the interior of Viti Levu who remained beyond his control showed their resistance to his church and state through their unshorn locks and unclothed bodies. Groups who rebelled against Bauan hegemony “threw off the cloth” and resumed traditional attire (Brewster 1922).

The colonial regime that replaced Cakobau’s government extended its sphere of control to include not only the bodies of Fijians but also the culturally constructed spaces they inhabited. Through a series of regulations and ordinances, the government sought to control such matters as how houses should be constructed and furnished, what activities could be carried out in them, how the space of the village was to be maintained, and so on. Ostensibly these regulations were designed to improve sanitation and public health and were motivated by concern over Fijian population decline. Similar concerns lay behind regulations that related specifically to women and their activities.

Thomas pointed out that these sanitation regulations reflected British notions of orderliness, which placed a high value on openness, clearly defined boundaries, and a particular way of ordering activities in spatial terms. He referred to the regulations as a symbolic labor, claiming that the prohibition of specific practices mattered less than the demonstration that the state had the power to regulate (1990, 167). I would argue, however, that more concrete issues of power and control were at stake here, regardless of whether they were apparent to colonial administrators or Fijian villagers. To control a subject population most effectively, the state cannot rely solely on external constraint; it must “invade” the bodies of its subjects. If a colonized people are to replicate the imposed power structure in their everyday actions, their movements, postures, and bodily habits must be remolded in appropriate ways. Such reordering of the body will be most effective if the cultural space through which bodies move is ordered in compatible ways. So, for example, regulations dealing with the ordering and use of domestic space were linked to European notions about appropriate gender relations and the importance of the nuclear family; they defined new spatial parameters within which Fijians would live their intimate lives. Similarly the consolidation of settlements and the relocation of population to more accessible sites not only facilitated routine administration, but also deconstructed the settlement pattern associated with warfare.

Issues relating to the reordering of the Fijian body (and body politic) by

colonialism and Christianity were raised in the rhetoric of ethnonationalistic protest following the election of the Coalition government in 1987. The main vehicle for this protest was the Taukei Movement.<sup>5</sup> While supporters of the Bavadra government regarded the movement as the product of a conspiracy among defeated Alliance politicians, its supporters maintained that the Taukei Movement was a spontaneous outpouring of Fijian protest against what was seen as an Indo-Fijian-dominated government. The events leading up to and following the coups of 1987 have generated an extensive literature that includes sources for background information on the Taukei Movement (see, eg, B Lal 1988; Robertson and Tamanisau 1988; Scarr 1988; V Lal 1990; Dean and Ritova 1988; Howard 1991). From its inception, Taukei rhetoric called attention to a tension between the Christian values that ought to govern human relationships and the fierceness and violence that characterized Fijian society in the pre-Christian era. These were sometimes juxtaposed as the “law of the Book” and the “law of the club” (see, eg, *Fiji Times*, 30 April 1987). Some Taukei supporters argued that the election of the Coalition government had pushed Fijians to the brink, and the time had come to take up the club once again.

On one occasion this threat became reality in a symbolically charged way. On 4 September 1987, two weeks before the second coup, a small coup of Taukei supporters gathered on the grounds of the Government Buildings. Their faces were blackened, a traditional preparation for war. Beside the statue of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, high chief and principal architect of the Fijian Administration (the “government within a government” that administers Fijian affairs), they dug an earth oven (*lovo*). Bearing clubs and spears they performed a war *meke* (dance-chant). Their spokesman made sure there would be no misunderstanding of their message. The action was taken to protest the legal complaint brought by the deposed prime minister, Dr Bavadra, against the governor-general for the dissolution of parliament. Bavadra’s suit was interpreted as an insult to the governor-general’s high rank as a paramount chief. If the matter were not dropped, the Taukei spokesman said, the *lovo* would be the ultimate result, a reference to cannibal feasting on the bodies of slain enemies.<sup>6</sup>

The threatened outcome of this tableau was the dissolution of the controls imposed by Christianity and colonialism. However, little over a year later the “law of the Book” defined the principal issue of ethnonationalistic protest. Following the second coup a Sunday Observance Decree had

been promulgated that prohibited commercial activities and most forms of public recreation (eg, organized sports) on Sundays. Late in 1988 the ban on public transport was to be lifted, raising fears among some Fijian Methodists that the entire set of prohibitions would eventually be suspended. They protested the relaxation through a series of roadblocks, using their bodies, at least figuratively, to disrupt the flow of traffic. The interim government took a firm stand, and large numbers of protesters were arrested.

The Sunday protest movement precipitated a serious split in the leadership of the Methodist Church. On one level the issues were religious in nature: whether observance of the Sabbath should be voluntary or compulsory—a matter of faith and conscience or a rule of law. Certainly the division in the church hierarchy was complicated by issues of personality and personal loyalty. But as with many other conflicts in Fiji, it is impossible to divorce the specific issue in dispute from the larger context of ethnic politics. While all ethnic groups were affected by the Sunday ban, the public transport companies were mainly Indo-Fijian owned, and most Indo-Fijians are not Christian. Perhaps not surprisingly, the language of those who protested the lifting of the transport ban carried a powerful subtext in which religion was linked with ethnicity and nationalism. In a meeting with Major General Rabuka, leader of the coups and, at the time, minister for home affairs in the interim government, dissident church ministers stated that the nation would not find peace, happiness, and stability from money and development. The welfare of the nation could only be assured by following the path of Christianity and observing the Sabbath. They warned that if the roadblocks did not deter the government from lifting the ban on public transport, more drastic action would be taken. Rabuka was reminded of his Christian duty; the Methodist Church's general secretary, Reverend Manasa Lasaro, was quoted as saying to him,

You should be willing to die to carry out the cause but we want you to know that we will support you even if we will have to be shot down. So much has been taken away from us [Fijians] and we are now left only with our faith, which we will fight to the death to keep. (*Fiji Times*, 20 December 1988)

For those who protested the lifting of the Sunday ban, the well-being of the body politic depended on subjecting the bodies of individuals to the ritual restrictions of Christian fundamentalism. Though dispossessed,

Fijians retained their Christian faith and must be willing to risk their mortal bodies for the good of their souls and the welfare of the nation.

Manichean dichotomies of darkness versus light, goodness versus evil, and Christian versus heathen are very much a part of Fijian discourse about their history and traditions. But even though ethnonationalistic rhetoric called attention to the contradictions between the warlike practices of the past and the teachings of Christianity, both were claimed as intrinsically Fijian. Together they constituted a reservoir of symbols that could be drawn on in the discourse of protest and ethnic differentiation. (Those who supported the Coalition government and the lifting of the Sunday ban countered with the language of constitutionality and a more tolerant reading of Christianity.)

Despite this rhetorical use of the contradictions and discontinuities of their history, Jolly's claim that Fijians also emphasize the continuity of their way of life is justified (1992b; see also Toren 1988). She is correct to point out that this perception of continuity was made possible by the retention of land rights and the validation of (some aspects of) Fijian custom by colonial authorities. Equally important to this perception, however, is the continuity that has existed in the relationship between hierarchy and religion in Fijian society. There have been continuities as well in the ways in which that relationship is manifested in bodily practice.

Sahlins has pointed out that in Fiji conversion to Christianity was a political act and a top-down process (1985; see also Thornley 1979). Chiefly converts brought their followers with them into the Christian fold. A district that resisted conversion was also resisting the hegemony of centralized government, and conversely, conversion was tantamount to political submission.<sup>7</sup> The pivotal role of chiefs in the conversion process, and subsequently in the politico-religious structures of church and state, had its counterpart in indigenous religion. Chiefs had been simultaneously officiants and the embodiments of gods in cults of prosperity (Hocart 1952).

In Christian Fiji, if no longer gods, chiefs are still conduits to the power of ancestors and ancestral deities who remain important though (in the orthodox Christian view) subservient to the Christian God, Na Kalou.<sup>8</sup> The Christian God and the ancestors are invoked in different contexts and through different means. Na Kalou is worshipped through prayer and the Christian liturgy, while the ancestors and ancestral deities are approached in the contexts of kava ritual and ceremonial exchange.



The hierarchic ordering of Fijian society involves principles of rank, seniority, and gender, but the ways in which these principles interact to produce inequality varies with context and with region. Throughout Fiji, however, chiefs, elders, and men play dominant roles in both Christian worship and *cakacaka vakavanua* (literally “work in the manner of the land or place,” that is, traditional ritual). In both types of rituals, key status differences are expressed and reinforced. One important medium through which this is accomplished is the spatial distribution of the participants. In all social gatherings, whether domestic or public, formal or recreational, secular or sacred, the seating arrangement expresses hierarchy in terms of a high-low distinction along a horizontal plane. That is, houses, churches, meeting halls, and kava circles all have an “upper” and “lower” end, and sitting higher or lower expresses inequality among chiefs and commoners, elders and younger people, and men and women (see Toren 1990; Turner 1988, 1992).

It is significant that the high-low distinction that structures the distribution of the participants in ritual is duplicated in the practices of everyday life (eg, meals). Ritual typically differentiates social categories through action and, at the same time, refutes the arbitrariness of those categories by linking them to the sacred. In the context of Fijian ritual, the spatial expression of hierarchy is sacralized, and in turn, everyday activities resonate with the sacred truths affirmed by ritual. The power of those who occupy superior positions in hierarchic relations (eg, men vis-à-vis women) is sustained in the process.

Fijian children learn the high-low distinction, and the status differences it expresses, as an integral part of the process of achieving mastery of their own bodies in everyday social settings (Toren 1990). Categories of thought (ie, key social and spatial categories) and bodily experience develop together, and meaning and practice are inseparably intertwined (cf, Combs-Schilling 1989). An expected consequence of this ontogenetic intertwining of categorical distinctions and embodied memory is the tendency to be deeply affected by violations of the code of respect. Such lapses conflict with a basic feature in the construction of Fijian personhood. This does not mean that Fijians never behave disrespectfully toward one another, but when they do, it is treated as a serious matter.

This kind of linkage between patterns of practice and social categories is not limited to Fiji, and one implication of this is that for any existing system of social categories to be radically transformed, established pat-

terns of habit memory must be replaced with new forms. For precisely this reason, revolutionary regimes attempt to restructure the routines of everyday life (see, eg, Connerton 1989).

In terms of the present discussion it is highly significant that Fijian villagers interpret their collective past in terms of the same dichotomous categories (eg, elder versus younger person and high versus low) that structure their interaction in the present. They also recognize an intimate relationship between their present lives and the past of their ancestors. They look to the past to understand events in the present (eg, a serious illness or sudden death may be explained as the moral consequence of ancestral actions). But in doing so they simultaneously apprehend the past in terms of the present (eg, they interpret the past in terms of what they know about the structural tensions wired into their existing social system). A socially constructed past and present thus confront one another like a set of parallel mirrors. Interpretations of the past reflect the needs, power relations, and understandings of the present, while the present is seen to unfold as a consequence of the past (see, eg, Turner 1986).

Although the specific contents of the relationships between elders and younger kin, chiefs and commoners, and men and women have changed over time and continue to change, the importance of these distinctions has not diminished. The embodied language of respect through which these hierarchic relations are expressed and reproduced serves as an important thread connecting past and present. Hierarchy is encoded in posture, movement, and the positioning of the body in social space, and though there have probably been changes in this incorporated language of respect, there are also features that are undoubtedly quite ancient (eg, the importance of the high-low distinction as a marker of gender, age, and rank inequalities).

Fijian claims of continuity of tradition, despite the acknowledged discontinuity of history, have to be understood in terms of these enduring, embodied, cognitive structures that inform practice. To be sure Christianity and colonialism wrought many changes, including the elimination of warfare. Prior to pacification, Fijian men kept their weapons near them at all times (Williams 1982). These habits of preparedness, as well as ideas about acceptable forms of aggression, gender roles, the content of exchange relationships between the living and their ancestors and ancestral gods (ie, human sacrifice and cannibalistic communion), and the configuration of the social landscape (ie, the composition and placement of vil-

lages), were all transformed by the elimination of warfare. The new possibilities for travel and newly created institutions (eg, schools, the Great Council of Chiefs) facilitated the diffusion of cultural forms throughout the islands and played important roles in the formation of a pan-Fijian identity. But if colonial rule eliminated or transformed some practices, it actively promoted others. There was general support for practices that promoted effective (though circumscribed) chiefly rule. Those ritual and ceremonial forms that reinforced hierarchic principles were valorized, and consequently an important source of bodily memory was retained.

Many Fijians choose to emphasize these continuities of practice rather than the (acknowledged) transformations and disjunctions. But this emphasis on continuity must be understood in relation to colonial and postcolonial history. Assertions of continuity of tradition resonate with Fijians' image of themselves as an indigenous people; that is, they claim continuity of both custom and place. The status of being an indigenous people is one that Fijians are aware of sharing with other peoples in the Pacific Islands region and beyond. In claiming that status in the context of the United Nations-sponsored Year of Indigenous Peoples, some Fijians sought to identify themselves with the political aspirations of submerged peoples.

Such claims reflect a perceived need to project and protect a collective identity that differentiates Fijians from all other peoples in the island group, but primarily from Indo-Fijians. In this context, the current controversy surrounding the term *Fijian* needs to be understood. A proposal to extend the term to include all citizens of Fiji regardless of their ethnicity was one of the reasons offered for a threatened vote of no confidence in the Rabuka government. To those who opposed the change, using the term *Fijian* for all citizens would weaken the claim to a distinctive identity on the part of Fiji's indigenous people and would suggest that all citizens are equally linked to Fiji as land or place.

The Sunday Observance Decree, which emerged as a divisive issue in 1987–88, continues to be explosive in the mid-1990s. The religious basis of Fijian protest is sincere, but it, too, must be understood in the context of ethnic politics. Fijians recognize that many of the practices of their ancestors were incompatible with Christianity (eg, cannibalism). But they point out that the ethic of caring and sharing (*loloma*) among kin, and mutual respect, important elements of Christian teaching, were also part of the ways of the ancestors. In the image that many Fijians have of them-

selves as a quintessentially Christian people, they are sharply differentiated from Indo-Fijians, most of whom are not Christian and are often depicted as self-seeking individualists pursuing "the path of money" rather than the ways of mutual love and respect. (See Toren 1984 for a discussion of the contrast drawn between the path of money and Fijian tradition.)

Understanding how contemporary Fijians think of themselves and others requires an awareness that culture contact produces "in a particularly powerful manner, essentialized constructs of selves and others" and that within these constructed identities particular customs come to be regarded as emblematic (Thomas 1992a, 82). In many cases the customs, practices, and institutions that Fijians claim as traditional differ in significant ways from those of their ancestors. One important kind of difference is traceable to the substantivization of practices that resulted from interaction with other peoples in the colonial context. That is, in the context of interaction with Europeans and Indians (and, earlier, with Tongans), Fijians and these other peoples objectified certain practices and made them emblematic of a distinctive Fijian identity. Whether or not the practices themselves were (trans)formed as a result of a contact, their significance was altered in an important way. "The way things are done" became "the way we do things"; that is, elements of culture as lived became objectified as tradition.

Rather than viewing tradition as a passively accepted legacy of the past, it is useful to think of it as continually reemerging in transmuted form from the crucible of history. That is, practices and institutions are continually reevaluated and reinterpreted in relation to changing circumstances that include other peoples. Fijian tradition is fluid, but I have argued that the fluidity is generated by the interaction between an underlying continuity and a particular history. The continuity is a product of the enduring, embodied categories of thought or action that structure relations between self and other. These constitute a distinctively Fijian way of "being in the world." The particularities of history have channeled the process of self-definition, in part by producing world, regional, and local systems of power. These impose limits on what is possible, as well as set the parameters for strategic calculations in the politics of identity. Within the realm of the possible, however, there is ample room for in-group disagreement and alternative visions of the collective past and future. Nowadays these alternative visions of Fijians' past and future are being promulgated through political parties, letters in newspapers, and

mass rallies, as well as being acted on in people's daily lives. Fijian tradition and identity are more process than finished product. Understanding them, however, requires a consideration of not only the creative, disputed discourse of self-definition, but also the factors of continuity and constraint that set its limits.

## CONCLUSION

In that evanescent juncture between past and future within which human beings live out their lives, all peoples confront questions about the nature, meaning, and value of their collective pasts. Like any other attempt to understand and represent, this is a creative, interpretive process. After all, the past can only be known indirectly through its traces—inscriptions, material remains, and memories. These traces never fully re-present the past, nor are they transparent.

Representations of collective pasts inevitably reflect the concerns and understandings of the present in which they are formed. Since even in the simplest of societies persons experience the present from the differing perspectives of their respective statuses, representations of the past reflect differing points of view. These differing viewpoints are asserted, contested, and resisted in public discourse and in private lives.

Much of the recent literature on tradition has focused on these creative and discursive processes. I have argued that key contributions to this literature have been flawed by an overemphasis on the malleability of tradition and on the novelty and disjunction inherent in invention. This emphasis results in a very synchronic view of tradition. The focus is on particular historical moments in which invented traditions emerge as reflections of particular agendas. Insufficient attention has been given to the personal and collective pasts that constrain invention and interpretation and make them intelligible as historical processes. Not only does this emphasis on malleability misrepresent the interpretive process, it also undercuts a people's sense of their tradition as collective memory. Memory, whether personal or collective, not only validates people's existence through time, it also sustains their identity in the present. By deemphasizing or even denying continuity, the invention-of-tradition literature can be interpreted (and has been) as threatening others' powers of self-definition.

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### Notes

1 This is perhaps more true for some peoples than for others, but even settler nations (eg, the United States and Australia) define themselves at least partly in terms of their collective pasts.

2 While such a statement may be uncontroversial for social scientists, it conflicts with the views of those peoples who understand their ways of life as patterned on archetypic forms mandated by deities or the ancestors. In writing about these views of the past as a model for the present, anthropologists need to pay special attention to the issue of continuity, the aspect of tradition that their informants themselves emphasize. This point is addressed at greater length later.

3 Ritual forms such as rites of passage, which otherwise satisfy the criteria of “genuine traditions” often use a combination of symbolism, ritual action, and explicit verbal instruction to deliberately inculcate values, identity (personal and collective), and respect for tradition (see, eg, Godelier 1986; Herdt 1981; Poole 1982). In that respect such rituals are problematic for Hobsbawm’s formulation. Ultimately, it is not the presence or absence of deliberate inculcation of values that is crucial to Hobsbawm’s distinction, but whether or not the historian is able to document the process of invention.

4 Jonathan Friedman’s (1992a) discussion of such key values in Hawaiian tradition as *aloha* (caring, sharing, reciprocity) and *aloha ‘āina* (caring for the land) makes an interesting comparison with their treatment in Linnekin’s theoretical discussions of Hawaiian tradition.

5 The word *taukei* means both “owner” and “native”—statuses that are defined in relation to *vanua* (land, place). This choice of names for the movement was significant, for Fijians, like most other Pacific Island peoples, recognize a link between social identity (both personal and collective) and land. Many Fijians would say that land lies at the heart of their sometimes troubled relationship with Indo-Fijians.

6 The violence was more than symbolic in nature. While the demonstration was going on, Richard Naidu, a spokesman for Dr Bavadra, wandered over to watch. When they spotted him, the demonstrators chased him across the street and into the lounge of the Travelodge Hotel. There they attacked him with clubs and spears in front of the horrified guests.

7 With its emphasis on accommodation to worldly authority, Wesleyan Methodism, the denomination to which most Fijians converted, was ideally suited to this welding of Christianity and chiefly rule. The relationship between individual chiefs and particular missionaries was not always mutually supportive, however. Chiefs on occasion vied with missionaries for control over congregations. Since churches were almost always built on Fijian-owned land, buildings were ultimately beyond the control of missionaries. Disaffected chiefs could also discourage (or fail to encourage) contributions to the mission, but the most powerful leverage a dissatisfied chief had was the threat of taking his people with him to another denomination (Thornley 1979).

8 Chiefs represented one conduit of power in pre-Christian religious practice. Another was the hereditary priest (*bete*). While the chiefly role was validated (and transformed) by Christianity, the priests' role could not be accommodated in the colonial Church-State. Members of priestly clans played prominent roles in the politico-religious movements that swept through the interior of Viti Levu in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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*Abstract*

In the postmodern world, tradition and identity are supplanting modernist political ideologies in the discourse about conflict. Historians and anthropologists who write about tradition necessarily enter the political arena within which the content and meaning of tradition are contested. In the 1980s, social scientists became sensitive to this issue. During that decade the most important contributions to the study of tradition focused on the issue of invention, the fashioning of representations of the past to meet the needs of the present. The invention-of-tradition literature made a useful contribution by linking tradition to such issues as the reproduction of social forms, the interaction of culture and history to produce change, and the role of human agency in both of these processes. Ultimately, however, the emphasis on the malleability of tradition negates what is ostensibly affirmed in this literature—that a people's traditions are a product of their historically situated action. Too little attention is paid to the ways in which interpretations of the past are constrained (and explained) by a determinate past and to the threads of continuity that link the present to that past. In part, the continuity that characterizes tradition is a consequence of the fact that traditions are *enacted* or *embodied*. These issues are explored, in part, through a discussion of the Fiji coups and their aftermath.

KEYWORDS: Fiji coups, postmodernism, praxis, tradition